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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 003186

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL EAID CU EUN USEU BRUSSELS

SUBJECT: EU CUBA POLICY: EMPHASIZING THE "CRITICAL" IN THE EU'S "CRITICAL DIALOGUE"

REF: A. A) STATE 163468  
B. B) ATHENS 2081  
C. C) WARSAW 2299  
D. D) VILNIUS 758  
E. E) HAVANA 9549

Classified By: USEU Poloff Todd Huizinga,  
for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is an action message. See para 10.

¶2. (C) Summary: On June 18, Poloff delivered reftel demarche (ref a) and discussed the EU's announced reevaluation of its common position on Cuba. Karl Buck (protect) of the EU Council Secretariat, said that the visit to Cuba of the Austrian Justice Minister Boehmdorfer (ref a) was in line with the EU's announced policy of limiting, but not banning, high-level EU visits to Cuba. Buck said that he was drafting a reevaluation of EU Cuba policy that was slated to serve as the basis for a new common position to be approved by EU foreign ministers at the July 22 General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC). He said his recommendation would likely be to continue the EU's "critical dialogue" with Cuba, but with a greater emphasis on the "critical." With the policy revision just beginning, Department may want to urge EU member states and institutions via political-level demarches to formulate a Cuba policy that foresees real consequences for Cuba's continued flouting of international norms. End Summary.

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EU Secretariat: Austrian Cuba Visit  
Puzzling, But In Line with  
Restrictions on High-Level Contacts  
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¶3. (C) Karl Buck (protect), Head of the Latin America Division in the EU Council Secretariat, told Poloff that, while he was somewhat puzzled that an EU member-state minister would visit Cuba at this moment, the EU's limitation of high-level contacts with Cuba did not preclude Boehmdorfer's visit. In fact, Buck stressed, the Austrians had consulted him on that very question to be sure they would not be breaking with the EU decision. Buck said that, although he had not been privy to Boehmdorfer's talking points, he was certain that Boehmdorfer would deliver a firm message to the GOC reiterating that the recent crackdown and the June 12 public denigration of Berlusconi and Aznar were unacceptable. However, Buck allowed that the USG view as expressed in reftel demarche made sense from our perspective, and promised to share the USG points with his counterparts in member-state ministries.

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New Common Position Planned for July 22:  
Continued Critical Dialogue Likely  
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¶4. (C) Buck said he would be the principal drafter of a proposed revised common position on Cuba. His paper is due for presentation to the EU Latin America Working Group (COLAT), which coordinates working-level policy formulation among member states, on July 1. In mid-July, a COLAT-revised version will then go to the Political and Security Committee (PSC) to prepare it for final approval by EU FonMins at the July 22 GAERC.

¶5. (C) Cautioning that he was just beginning to draft, Buck said the paper would have two main sections. One part would examine whether current EU development assistance activity in Cuba was effectively promoting EU objectives there (peaceful transition to democracy, economic reform, respect for human rights). That section, said Buck, would be drafted by EU member-state development officials. Buck added that he had "no idea what each of the member states is doing on development in Cuba."

¶6. (C) Buck said the section he is preparing would propose restructuring the EU's critical dialogue with Cuba so as to promote more effectively the EU's unchanged objectives there (see para 4 above). When pressed for specifics, Buck remained vague. It appears, though, that

Buck is planning to suggest, when all is said and done, more of what the EU has announced in recent statements: a tougher line on GOC repression and specific signals of the EU's disapproval of Cuba's actions within the framework of a continued EU-Cuba "critical dialogue." The three measures announced on June 5, limiting high-level governmental visits, reducing the profile of member states' participation in cultural events, and inviting Cuban dissidents at national day celebrations may be reiterated, but Buck did not share specifics of any new ideas.

COLAT Consensus: Don't Isolate Cuba

17. (C) Buck noted his impression that the Cuban attempt to humiliate Aznar and Berlusconi had brought the member states closer together in mutual support, regardless of "opinions you or I may have about Berlusconi." He said that, while he perceived shades of difference among member states on how tough they wanted to get with Cuba, "no one" had advocated cutting off dialogue. He said the sense remained within the COLAT that isolating Cuba would only play into the hands of the regime's hardliners.

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EU Approach to Remain Distinct  
From That of U.S.  
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18. (C) Several times, Buck averred that USINT Havana's recent tough criticism of the regime had provided Castro with a cover and a justification for his actions. (Buck did not specify which actions.) His impression was that some U.S. "hardliners" thought that the EU might be coming around to an approach more supportive of the U.S. embargo. He stressed that that was not the case, and implied that part of the EU motivation for reevaluating its Cuba policy was to avoid getting squeezed between "hardliners in the U.S. and hardliners in Cuba" towards cutting lines of communication with Cuba.

19. (C) Buck said, however, that he believed that the statement of the EU's revised common position would avoid criticism of the U.S. embargo. He said he doubted that the statement would mention any third parties at all, but that if the U.S. were mentioned, it would likely not be in name, but indirectly in an assertion of the EU's intention to work together with its partners to promote democracy in Cuba.

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Comment: USG May Want to Push  
for Tougher EU Cuba Policy  
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10. (C) The EU has repeatedly taken a tough line toward Cuba recently, culminating in declarations on June 5 and June 16 limiting contacts with Cuba and declaring Cuban behavior toward the EU unacceptable. As USINT Havana points out (ref e), the GOC's recent taunts of the EU virtually dare it to take a stronger position against the regime. Nonetheless, it appears that the new common position on Cuba could well become, for all practical purposes, more of the same: continuation of EU dialogue with Cuba interspersed with regular, perhaps harsher but basically inconsequential, declarations condemning GOC repression. With the reformulation of EU Cuba policy in its beginning stages, this may be the time for us to push the EU to back up its words with actions. To that end, post asks Department to consider approaching member and accession states and EU institutions at the political level to urge them that their common position on Cuba include real consequences for Cuba's continued failure to live up to international norms. With the regime's anti-EU antics, with Italy taking up the EU presidency on July 1, and with many of the Central European EU accession states expressing strong aversion to GOC actions (refs c and d), a high-level demarche could carry considerable weight. End comment.

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